

**The Women's Mau: Female Peace Warriors in  
Western Samoa**

**Plan B Paper**

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## THE WOMEN'S MAU: FEMALE PEACE WARRIORS IN WESTERN SAMOA

*We are a peace-loving people and law-abiding people who gave up warlike ways over thirty years ago. We have been schooled in religion and in the arts of reading and writing for a period of just one hundred years. But we love our country, our own people, our own civilization and our own social and political systems better than any others less known to us. We are a passive people but we are determined and resolute.* (Field 1991, p. 194 from Women's Mau to Forbes July 1930 IT 1/23/8)

This quote, written by Samoan women petitioning New Zealand's colonial administrator of Western Samoa depicts their solidarity as peoples and their determination as Christians to protest peacefully.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the significant role of women in Western Samoa's nationalist movement, the *Mau*, which organized in peaceful protest against the New Zealand colonial administration from 1926-1936. The movement has been labeled unique by historians and has been given credit for contributing to Western Samoa's achievement of sovereignty in 1962, the first in the South Pacific. Samoan historian Malama Meleisea illustrates the importance of the movement;

*The previous attempts by the Samoan leaders to organize commercial ventures that would give the Samoans greater economic powers had ended in failure and humiliation, confirming in their minds the belief that only through fa'a Samoa could dignified autonomy be maintained. The movement led to unprecedented unity among the Samoans by providing a focus for political activity centered on the struggle for government based on Samoan traditional institutions. This provided the unchallenged framework for Samoan independence which came thirty-four years later* (Meleisea 1992,46).

Women were among those determined to ensure that Samoa would one day be ruled again by Samoans, and they merit recognition for the continuation of the *Mau* movement long after the New Zealand government had assumed it was extinguished. The *Mau* Movement is a historical focal point of this paper due to the unquestionable power that was asserted by women of all ages and social standings when they formed their own Women's *Mau* in 1930, despite troublesome consequences. Threatened by the *Mau's* popularity,

the New Zealand administration declared it a seditious organization and took harsh measures to eliminate it. Despite the assassination of their leader, the banishment of other high chiefs, and the mistreatment of the women and children, the *Mau* continued their pledge of peaceful resistance. Ninety percent of the Samoan population supported the movement as well as several Europeans and part Europeans. After the *Mau* movement was declared a seditious organization, the men of the *Mau* went to prison or eluded officials by hiding in the bush. It then became the responsibility of the women of Samoa to guide and lead the people.

In 1930 the Women's *Mau* numbered over 8,000 and had international support from the Women's International League For Peace and Freedom (Rosabel Nelson to Olaf Frederick Nelson 08/23/30 Nelson Correspondence). They raised funds, organized meetings, rallies and processions, and filed petitions with members of parliament. Samoan women overseas also took up the cause of "*Samoa mo Samoa*,"<sup>1</sup> a *Mau* motto. The actions and voices of the Women's *Mau* were powerful and persuasive in the fight for Samoa's freedom from oppressive rule. The women's determination to regain sovereign control of their nation proved stronger than the threats of the colonial administration and the influences of the religious leaders who counseled them to return to their roles as mothers, sisters, and village peace keepers.

Most historical accounts of the *Mau* Movement have yet to detail the importance of women in the movement. Contrary to previous interpretations of events, this paper details the participation, sacrifices, and accomplishments of women in the movement. The discovery of personal letters, petitions of protest to the colonial administration and the Prime Minister of New Zealand, and relevant newspaper articles, suggest that the actions of the Women's *Mau* had great influence on all of the residents of and visitors to Samoa. The women were instrumental in the overall success of the *Mau* movement despite vehement opposition. This paper is significant because it involves re-examining history to include and to validate the participation of women in an important historical event that helped to shape the political, social, and economic circumstances in contemporary and independent Western Samoa.

Samoan myths, genealogies, and traditional roles of women will be briefly examined first in this paper to demonstrate the power attributed women in the Samoan culture. Samoan traditions and female power have remained strong despite years of

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<sup>1</sup>"Samoa for the Samoans"

influence from Europeans, particularly during the missionary and colonial periods when entire social systems eroded in the process of assimilation favored by foreigners. Many of these changes drastically affected the daily lives of women and will be discussed throughout this paper. The lack of respect from colonial administrators towards women is proven to have been a catalyst for the *Mau* men, and the women drew their strength from the traditional system. The author finds that a Samoan social covenant exists that explains the emergence and dispersal of the Women's *Mau* movement. This fundamental principle of Samoan ideology, *feagaiga*, suggests that the validity of the Women's *Mau* movement is significant culturally as well as historically.

The origins and participants of the *Mau* movement, which was eventually led by Samoan women, are then examined. For the purposes of this paper, to demonstrate the participation of women in the movement, several sources have been used, including newspapers, correspondence, official documents, and previously published materials. These sources provide the necessary information to affirm that the involvement of Samoan women in the *Mau* movement has mistakenly been forgotten or misinterpreted in the past.

## Samoan Legends of Origin

Most Polynesian societies trace their heritage to a deity or god of creation. In Samoa, this god who is the creator of the universe is known as Tagaloa, or Tagaloalagi. It is told that the daughter of Tagaloalagi, Sinataeolelagi (Sina excreta of the heavens), bore the sun (o le la) as her child, La. La grew up and returned to his mother's heavenly home in the East, but moved every evening to the West to rest. After the all powerful force created the geographical forms of the physical environment he then created human beings. Many versions of the myth of creation tell of Tagaloalagi sending his daughter Tuli in the form of a bird to transform creeping maggots, a symbol of transformation and life, into human beings. The duties of Tagaloalagi did not end there. According to historian Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea, "In Samoan theology females were vessels of divinity with powers to attract the supernatural impregnating force personified by Tagaloalagi" (Schoeffel Meleisea 1983, 175-177). Supernatural power or *mana* was transmitted to humans by the Samoan deity Tagaloalagi through the perpetuation of the chiefly bloodline through intercourse with women.

*An elaborate descent structure was thus created, represented at the apex by the alii pa'ia, the sacred chief who traced direct descent from the gods through female ancestors. A graded hierarchy of chiefs represented the sub lineage of the maximal descent groups, and their rank too, was dependent upon matrilineal inherited mana. The maintenance of rank depended on the non-dilution of ancestral mana, thus it was essential that the incumbents of high chiefly offices be born of high ranking mothers (Schoeffel Meleisea 1979, 282)*

Samoan women, who held divine qualities, appear to have largely escaped the notion of positive and negative forces often ascribed to Polynesian men and women by anthropologists. This common trait of 'female pollution' seems to be evident by *tapu* or restrictions placed upon women by their male counterparts such as the cases in Hawai'i and Aote'aroa (New Zealand). Schoeffel Meleisea says,

*In western Polynesia and particularly in Samoa and Tonga there does not appear to have been a differentiation between male and female principles in the universe as claimed by Handy; furthermore when such dyads are apparent they do not associate gender with positive and negative aspects of nature. The tapu imposed upon women as described in eastern Polynesia was not observed in Samoa by outsiders in the early 19th century, nor are such themes pronounced in*

*the oral traditions of the Samoans as they were recorded last century or as they are told today (Schoeffel Meleisea 1983, 176)*

In fact, women of the highest rank and power such as Nafanua and Salamasina are remembered in Samoan legends, chiefly titles and myths. Samoan legends are oral in nature and tend to vary in content in the many written sources. In 'Sacred Women Chiefs and Female Headmen in Polynesian History,' Niel Gunson writes of female warriors, "In Samoa there was also a tradition of such women. The prototype was possibly the female warrior who became the war goddess Nafanua, whose father regarded her as 'good as an army' and of whom it was said that when she was fighting those who saw her assumed she was a man" (Gunson 1987,143).

One account of the legends of Nafanua and Salamasina begins here,

*Saveasi'uleo was an aitu who ruled Pulumotu, the spirit underworld. He had the upper body of a man and the lower body of an eel. His wife was his sister's daughter, Tilafaiga, an aitu who originated in Manu'a. She and her twin sister Taema had swum from Samoa to Fiji and returned with the instruments for tattooing. A practice which they introduced to Samoa. The child of Tilafaiga and Saveasi'uleo was an abortion ('alu'alu toto, a clot of blood), which was buried but emerged in the form of an adult woman. Her name was Nafanua (meaning 'Hidden in the earth') and she made her home in Falealupo, at the western end of the island of Savai'i close to the faga, the rocks which mark the entrance to the underworld Pulumotu where the spirits of departed chiefs go after death. At that time the eastern districts of Savai'i had conquered the western districts. Nafanua led the people of the west against the people of the east and defeated them. Following her victory she apportioned political authority over the various districts of Samoa among the chiefs who came to pay homage to her. She continued to live at Falealupo and communicated through her priest Tupua'i, son of Tonumaip'e'a. The Tonumaip'e'a title became associated thereafter with Nafanua. Tonumaip'e'a married Le'atogaugatuitoga, daughter of Sanalala and Gatoloaiaolelagi, and their daughter was Levalasi Sooa'emalelagi who adopted Salamasina. (Schoeffel Meleisea 1987, 182)*

After the assassination of the Tui Atua Matautia, his wife Levalasi Sooa'emalelagi moved with her adopted daughter, Salamasina, to Leulumoega on Upolu to stay with her cousin

*Tui A'ana* Tamalelagi. Through Sooa'emalelagi, the sister of Nafanua's priest Tupa'i, the *Tui A'ana* sought the support of the warrior goddess Nafanua. By spiritual means, Nafanua conquered the rival districts thereby uniting all of Samoa. She took the four main district titles of *Tui A'ana*, *Tui Atua*, Gatoaitale, and Tamasoalii, and bestowed them to her relative Sooa'emalelagi who deferred the honor to her adoptive daughter Salamasina.

According to Schoeffel Meleisea, the significance of this lengthy story is, "The bestowal of the four titles upon her thus recognized her genealogical and titular paramountcy in the land, which entitled her to be addressed as *o le tafa'ifa* ('four sided' or 'one supported by four'). This was not a title in itself, but the term given from that time on to chiefs, who by holding the four *papa*, could claim to be *o le tupu o Samoa* -- the paramount chief of Samoa." Later she stated,

*Salamasina's historical significance was that she was the means of drawing together all the great aristocratic bloodlines and links to supernatural power in a period of political transformation, to create a basis of legitimacy for the new power brokers of Samoa, the orator group Tumua of A'ana and Atua. For the next four centuries or so, they were to manipulate the new dynasty she gave birth to through control of the paramount titles which they were empowered to bestow* (Schoeffel Meleisea 1987, 191)

Salamasina's descendants are the source of many of the notable modern chiefly titles such as Mata'afa, Tuimalealiifano, Tupua and Malietoa. The Mata'afa and Tuimalealiifano titles are descended from Sina and Taufau, Salamasina's granddaughters by her first born who was a girl, Fofoaivao'ese. Salamasina's son Tupumanaia was kidnapped by a rival village and given their title. Several generations later his descendent was adopted by Muagututia, a great chief descended from Salamasina. This adoption gave rise to the third and fourth major contemporary titles of Tupua and Malietoa. This demonstrates that although *matai* title holding is male privileged, many titles originated with the female deity Sina.

Kinship and the bestowal of family titles are invaluable elements in Samoan culture. An intricate kinship system revolving around the holders of family chiefly titles, *matai*, is the foundation in the Samoan socio-political system. The Samoan kinship system and its structure are consistent throughout the Samoan islands, making it the underlying foundation on all semblances of culture and customs. Jan Hjarno wrote, "As regards the distribution of *pule* to the land and the *tautua* -- obligations, all *matai* titles formed part of a single ramified structure. There was thus one national segmented structure. This has



hitherto been overlooked. It is, however, an absolute prerequisite that we acknowledge this structure in order to understand the social and political articulation of Samoa" (Hjarno 1980, 87).

The *matai* positions are elected positions within a family, not inherited. There may be several *matai* titles in one *aiga*, and all of them given allegiance by the people. The *aiga*, or the Samoan family structure, is unlike the nuclear families a Western person may envision. The *aiga* includes the extended family from all types of alliances made through marriage, adoption, and politics. It is the allegiance to *matai* that ensures the people inherent rights to lands that will provide subsistence living. The origins of *matai* titles are remembered in genealogies, legends and myths.

### Traditional Roles of Samoan Power

Women were (and are) elected to the position of *matai*. Aiona Fana'afi writes, "If a *tama'ita'i*<sup>2</sup> is selected by the extended family to be the *matai*, or title-holder, she assumes the responsibility of seeing that the family heritage is utilized properly and allocated fairly to the heirs who require or wish to cultivate the land. She has the duty of protecting the land as well as the standing of the *matai* title as would a male *matai*, for a *matai* is neither male nor female but merely the trustee of the *aiga* heritage and *aiga* land" (Fana'afi 1986, 105).

Lowell Holmes writes in *Anthropological Quarterly*, "The point that we are making here is that since all males, and in some villages all females, without regard to sex line or seniority, are eligible for election to a chiefly rank virtually every one has had a stake in the traditional system and have understandably been less disposed to leave it for an uncertain destiny in the white man's world of status" (Holmes 1980, 194).

In contrast, Father Joseph Deihl, S.M. published 'The Position of Women in Samoan Culture' in 1932 *Primitive Man: Quarterly Bulletin of the Catholic Anthropological Conference* that stated that women were not likely to hold titles. He wrote,

*Samoan political culture was markedly developed. But there was very little place therein for women, since political offices were elective and not hereditary, and women had less chance of being elected...Usually an office went to one who could by his wealth and ability uphold such a position.*

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<sup>2</sup>polite term for women

*Women would not ordinarily possess the qualities demanded, and so would stand little chance of holding office and of thus participating in political life (Deihl 1932, 21-22)*

This is clearly a biased example, expressed by a Catholic priest who by tradition views women as being unqualified for positions held by males in the western world. Samoan culture is markedly different in that women did aspire to very high positions, such as the warrior goddess Nafanua and the *tafa'ifa* Salamasina.

Many diverse females assumed powerful roles in traditional Samoan society such as the village *taupo* (ceremonial hostess), the *fofo* (traditional healer), a member of a village women's committee, a maker of fine mats and other ceremonial goods, and a matron.

The village *taupo* is usually the young virgin of high rank in the village. She is given the highest respect from village *matai*, and is responsible for mixing the *kava*, the ceremonial beverage of many Pacific islands including Samoa. In the ceremony that is structured by a complex ranking system for seating, the village *taupo* assumes an honorable position. Anthropologist Felix M. Keesing wrote, "She was the boast and toast of the village and in considerable degree the social and political organization revolved around her" (Keesing 1937, 1). The *taupo* is nurtured by the other women in the village and is hostess to visiting guests and is a gracious representative when traveling to other villages. She served as one of the many mediums of distribution for gifts, a most important feature of Samoan social custom. Keesing writes,

*While in the long run working out more or less to an equilibrium of gain and loss, they not only intensified Samoan economic life but also served to display and enhance the dignity of ranking folk and their relatives. This socio-economic exercise reached its height in the formal exchanges made at the taupo's marriage, when the utmost resources of foods and ritual goods would be marshaled for the occasion by the kinsfolk and communities involved (Keesing 1937,5)*

He continues to say about the village *taupo* and her political functions,

*An all-important political function has received mention already. In old Samoa, with its traditional family, community and district feuds and frequent warfare, the taupo marriages served as a potent means of securing strategic alliances, and all such unions seem to have been made with this political end in view (Keesing 1937, 5)*

Marriage alliances were one of the most successful ways of securing rank, for women and men and their offspring. Women were active participants in pursuing such alliances. In her article 'Rank, Gender, and Politics in Samoa,' Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea says, "Women were actively interested and involved in the manipulation of genealogical connections in the competition to maximize claims to rank, in order to win renown for themselves and their children" (Schoeffel Meleisea 1987, 191). It was common to intermarry the daughters of Samoan high chiefs to high chiefs of Tonga and Fiji, thus increasing their range of kinship ties and *pule* (power or authority).

Another powerful position held by women is the traditional healer, or one trained in special arts relating to healing or medicine. Like the *taupo*, the tradition is continued by older women handing down knowledge to younger women. Father Joseph Diehl wrote in 1932,

*The woman was the doctor and even today is a skilled one. Many of the native medicines are in the control of women and are handed down from mother to daughter. It is impossible to learn much of these secret medicines. Each woman specialized in her own medicine. A sick person would often go the rounds of all the doctors before it was finally decided which doctor could cure him. The natives have great faith in their own doctors and try them first before coming to white doctors (Diehl 1932, 26)*

The most common healer the *fofo*, is specialized in deep healing massage. The *fofo* uses a combination of coconut oil and medicinal herbs as her massaging medium. Another perfumed oil used at festivities, *suau'u*, was also the preparation of a woman. Kramer stated, "Many of these recipes are the secrets of these old witches, who know how to practice magic on stubborn souls with the ensnaring fragrance of their oils" (Kramer 1994, 478).

Augustin Kramer describes the following actions of the midwife, a position held by women. Interestingly there is no term for midwife, only the adjective *fa'atosaga* meaning to act like a midwife. From Reverend George Turner's *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, London John Snow, Paternoster Row, published in 1861, Kramer writes that the midwife cuts the umbilical cords of babies according to their gender. The umbilical cord of a boy was cut on a club, so that courage and bravery might dwell in him when a man, and that of

a girl was cut on a tapa board that is the symbol of female industry (Kramer 1994 from Turner 1861, 79).

An intriguing role of Samoan females exists among those who are trained in the art of embalming. According to Kramer, embalming was frequently practiced on chiefs. They shaved the head of the chief, removed and burned the intestines, and then pricked all parts of the body with needles so that the fluid would flow out. Daily, they rubbed the body with oil and curcuma and *ma'ali* resin (*Canarium* tree). This was performed in a special house for months, where the women placed themselves at each of the four limbs, remaining silent throughout the process. At the end of the process the women replaced the original hair onto the head of the chief with plant resin (Kramer 1994, 181).

In traditional societies the villages of Samoa had two distinct decision making groups, men and women. While the men's functions were more utilitarian, the women's functions were mostly as moral judges, and they were relied upon to ensure social harmony. Women retained the rights to land through their *aiga*, not the *aiga* of their husband. It was therefore not unusual for women who had married into the village to deal with other equally important village issues not dealt with by *matai*. There is not always a female *matai* included in the village *fono*, the official meetings of the chiefs, but male descendants of a female line are ever present. Lowell Holmes explains that, "While there were easily recognized male and female branches of every kindred, originating with the offspring of the original holder of the family title, the male line, *tama tane*, served as the executive branch but always subject to the veto of the female line, the *tama fafine*" (Holmes 1980, 194). The descendants of the female branch are therefore accorded the higher rank.

"The *faletua ma tausi* (wives of chiefs and orators)," writes Keesing, "meeting in a council that follows old custom by being it is set-up as a female replica of the men's council, deal with many matters other than those that pertained to women in earlier days" (Keesing 1937, 9). The terms *faletua* and *tausi* have been interpreted as derogatory terms meaning literally, "house at the back" and "to care for" respectively. The interpretations of these terms can only be related to Samoan customs and cannot be measured by a westernized system of status. The *faletua*, is the house behind the house used for visiting parties and informal meetings. The family of the *ali'i* resides in the *faletua* of which the wife is the primary caretaker. The *tausi* is therefore similarly named for the unique service that she provides to her husband the *tulafale* or orator.

The wives of *matai*, according to Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea,

*not only take their status in the village from their husbands but they may also represent their husbands on occasions when they are too busy, or for some reason do not wish to represent themselves. Thus, the wives of matai often attend ceremonial occasions, make speeches, even accept a cup of kava as representatives of their husbands. The wives of matai usually play the major decision making role when it comes to contributions to ceremonial redistributions of property, choosing which ie toga will be presented, how much money will be collected (often themselves going about the aiga connections to collect ie toga and money) (Schoeffel Meleisea 1979, 232-233)*

Missionary John Williams of the London Missionary Society who landed on the island of Savai'i in 1830, remarked in his journal in 1832 that Samoan women,

*...don't seem to be oppressed as formerly in Tahiti.. men have great confidence in their wives, entrust them with their property, consult them on matters of state (i.e., the chiefs do this)...*

Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea says, "This is as true an observation of contemporary Samoa as it was to Williams of Samoa in 1832" (Schoeffel Meleisea 1979, 230). Anthropologist Peggy R. Sanday expands on the important strength drawn from traditional "committees" and attributes the success of the Women's *Mau* movement to the traditional women's committees (Keesing 1937,9, Sanday 1973, 1697). Sanday said, "The traditional women's committees in Western Samoa also laid the basis for the later Women's *Mau* movement, which gave women a strong taste for politics" (Sanday 1973, 1697). Though this is partially true, I would argue here that the determination behind these women to stand up to the oppressive force of the administration lies elsewhere.

Since the 1920's the Women's Committee has been indisputably "modern," as a result of colonial and religious influences. This development, according to Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea, has eroded the existing divisions of the village of the women and the village of the men. "However, in important traditional political centers such as Leulumoega, Le falefa, Safotu and others the *aualuma* <sup>3</sup> of *tamaitai* have retained much of their traditional role and prestige," according to Meleisea (Schoeffel Meleisea 1979, 310).

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<sup>3</sup>traditional women's group

She claims that the women of Leulumoega village, known as "O le Tei o Sooaimalelagi," (the younger sisters of Sooaimalelagi, the adoptive mother of Salamasina), act independently of the authority of the matai. In a case where the honor of the village was at stake, O le Tei o Sooaimalelagi as a group over turned the decision of the matai (Schoeffel Meleisea 1979, 311).

On the whole, the role of women changed when the colonial governments encouraged women's committees to introduce European ideologies, and health and sanitation laws. Women were directly involved with the government health teams and the administration and most of their energies were spent here. The women were very efficient and were important assets to the colonial administrations. Women's Committees continue to be the vehicle for the government and non governmental organizations to implement programs and to inform the villages on various issues. The strength of these modern Women's Committee can be attributed to the traditional roles of Samoan women in the villages.

All women despite their marital and social status, are the makers of the *'ie toga* and *siapo*, the fine mat and bark cloth. The intricately woven pandanus leaf mat and skillfully produced bark cloth, in Samoan tradition, are the foundations of highly formalized exchange systems during the recognition of rites of passages such as births, marriages, and deaths. These items are considered to be "female wealth" (Linnekin 1991, 2) as they are produced by women. These items are traditionally exchanged for items produced by men, including tools and canoes. The "male wealth" or *'oloa* has come to more recently include goods of European manufacture, such as tinned food and money. The women's painstaking work on the *ie toga* and *siapo* is made easier with the addition of more women to the *aiga*, an influential incentive for marriage, birth, and adoption. The production of the *'ie toga* and *siapo* are examples of the important roles of women in Samoan society.

Widows and matrons are honored in Samoan society. Throughout their lives women continue to pass on cultural knowledge to younger generations. They never lose their status as moral guardians in their villages and families. "Even after death," according to Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea, "the female members of the descent group are believed to act as moral guardians. The term *ilamutu* is used to refer to the ghost of a famous ancestress" (Schoeffel Meleisea 1983,74). This example is a manifestation of the high regard and respect given to Samoan women by tradition.

The final concept of relationships between women and the kinship system is the Samoan covenant, *feagaiga*, which is critical to understanding Samoan social philosophy and doctrine. Though this concept commonly transcends into all facets of Samoan society, it is most commonly related to the brother-sister relationship. Schoeffel-Meleisea continues to say that *feagaiga* relationships include the classes of kinship and gender, religion, and political relations. According to Schoeffel Meleisea, "*Feagaiga* expresses the idealized principles by which order exists in Samoan society at all levels of organization. It contrasts sacred, moral ideological principles with utilitarian, functional or "profane" human actions, in a social contract by which the former imposes order and dignity upon the latter" (Schoeffel Meleisea 1983, 280).

The author suggests that the *feagaiga* covenant is responsible for the formation, effectiveness, and dispersal of the Women's *Mau* movement after 1936. *Feagaiga* is the ideology within the Samoan culture that allowed women the flexibility to work in a complementary arrangement to continue the *Mau* movement. The *feagaiga* ideology also suggests that though the women may have gained a "strong taste for politics" as a result of the Women's *Mau* movement, women have not continued to exercise their political authority in such an aggressive manner since that time due to the same concept of *feagaiga*.

The term *feagaiga* comes from the root *aga* (social conduct), and the word *feagai*, which is a verb meaning "to face, be opposite" (Milner 1993,8). As a noun *feagaiga*, is, as explained previously, a contractual relationship between two opposing forces. This special *feagaiga* relationship exists in many relationships such as brother and sister, husband and wife, sisters and wives, and the *matai* and his *aiga*. Each of these relationships have distinct and complementary roles by tradition. These distinctions are cultural and cannot be translated into a situation of inequality between parties. In fact, Schoeffel Meleisea writes, "...*feagaiga* relationships do not involve totally discrete categories but rather the contrast between two halves of the same whole" (Schoeffel Meleisea 1983, 70). Anthropologist Bradd Shore who has written in great detail of the many aspects of duality in Samoan society defines the *feagaiga* as a contract of mutual respect. He writes, "*Feagaiga* connotes in particular a covenant of peace" (Shore 1982, 215). The complementary actions of two halves of the whole are working together for peace.

This ideology can be applied in a broader definition to illustrate the traditional authority that was asserted during the *Mau* movement. When Samoans formed the *Mau*, Men's and Women's, it was the rejection of external forces that motivated nearly ninety

percent of the population to emerge in unity to restore traditional power. According to historian Malama Meleisea,

*The previous attempts by the Samoan leaders to organize commercial ventures that would give the Samoan leaders greater economic powers had ended in failure and humiliation, confirming in their minds the belief that only through fa'a Samoa<sup>4</sup> could dignified autonomy be maintained. The movement led to unprecedented unity among the Samoans by providing a focus for political activity centered on the struggle for government based on Samoan traditional institutions. (Meleisea 1992, 46)*

The major lineages of Samoa's traditional authority were united in attempts to regain a dignified autonomy. The administration did not honor the traditional authority asserted by the Men's *Mau* and ultimately declared the movement a seditious organization. The harmony of the *feagaiga*, or covenant, was disrupted when the men were banned from participating in the movement and the women naturally fulfilled their role of the covenant by forming their own faction, the Women's *Mau*. Women immediately responded to fulfill their customary role supported by the *fa'a Samoa* and the *feagaiga* covenant.

As illustrated earlier, women exercise considerable power in the traditional Samoan political structure. In her paper *Booty, Bait, Bystander or Brains?: The Woman's Role in Political Change in 18th and 19th Century Polynesia*, political scientist Deacon Ritterbush of the University of Hawai'i wrote that Polynesian women in general "Played a far more incisive role in initiating or manipulating political change than ever before credited" (Ritterbush 1987, 4). Perhaps unacquainted with Samoan political history, Ritterbush writes in summary, "With the exception of Samoa, all other societies under review saw women either manipulating and/or cementing strategic military bonds" (Ritterbush 1987, 36). This summary is incorrect, the reader will conclude, after reading about the following events in Western Samoa's political history.

## Colonialism

The era of expansionism brought the greater powers of the world into the Pacific and Germany raised its colonial flag over Western Samoa on March 1, 1900. Samoan

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<sup>4</sup>The Samoan way



islanders already had seventy years of experience dealing with Germans and other Europeans who were at some level trying to control them through economics and religion. The Europeans learned of the great internal struggles dividing the Samoans and used this method to play one Samoan group against the other for the benefit of the Europeans. It was usual in Samoa for foreign forces to take sides with one prominent islander or family in hopes of persuading others to follow. Samoa's new German governor Wilhelm Solf supported the Samoan leader Iosefo Mata'afa and led him to believe that he was a ruling partner with Germany.

It became increasingly clear to many Samoans that they were no more than subordinates to the German government. This discontent grew after Solf's policies affected Samoan traditional customs such as the distribution of *ie toga*, fine mats. The Administrator also forbade them to organize the copra cooperative *Oloa* that would break the monopoly of the German plantations. *Oloa* was an organized movement protesting against the German monopoly on the cash economy.

Solf went on to completely dismantle Mata'afa's organization and his system of supporters as well as erase the traditional oratory powers of the chiefly lineages *Tumua* and *Pule* in the *fa'alupega*, the orators traditional book of village greetings. This last move, to discount the authority of the *Tumua* and *Pule*, the "backbones" of Samoan society and the source of identity, was the last in a series of atrocities that forced Lauaki Namulau'ulu Mamoe, the leader of the *Mau e Pule* (a group concerned for the stabilization of the economy) to head a fight against the German administration.

Lauaki spent several months competing against the German government for support of the people. This opposition was threatening to the colonial administration as Lauaki had thousands of supporters on the main islands of Upolu and Savai'i. The German government deported him to the distant island of Tarawa where he died not long after. Solf's successors experienced similar discontent in the islands until they surrendered to New Zealand forces on August 29, 1914 as a result of British victory at the end of World War I (Field 1991, 26).

The New Zealand administrators were not an improvement over their paternalistic German predecessors. The early years of the administration were largely uneventful, with little interference from the government into Samoan affairs and vice versa. Plantations were no longer run by the German companies, and most of their indentured Chinese

laborers were repatriated. The break up of the German copra monopoly in combination with growing world economies left the field of opportunities wide open for prospective entrepreneurs. To regulate the sale and production of copra and to protect small business owners, the *Toeaina* Club was formed by disgruntled residents. Similar to the *Oloa* Club during the German administration, the *Toeaina* Club functioned to give Samoans more economic security. The Club started out with an economic agenda, but actually served as a social and political grassroots movement for the stir that was to come (Hempenstall and Rutherford 1984, 32).

As a direct result of administrative incompetence and poor judgment the administration allowed the influenza infested ship the *SS Talune* call at Apia harbor in November 1918. This was the first introduction of the pneumonic influenza, which is estimated to have killed over one third of the Samoan population. The New Zealand administration had received the same timely warning as the Americans in Eastern Samoa. The administration also rejected medical assistance offered to them by Americans who had taken the proper steps to protect their citizens' health. Samoans blamed the epidemic on the New Zealand Government after discovering that they had been needlessly exposed to the disease (Field 1991, 44).

In Western Samoa many chiefs and elders of families did not survive, leaving only the young, untitled men and women to guide the family, bury the dead and work the crops. Those who did survive were left in a weakened physical condition. Many Samoans did not have a proper burial, but were tossed into mass grave sites and buried at the insistence of the administration. There is evidence that some persons were not yet dead before being buried in such a grave (Hempenstall and Rutherford 1984, 33).

Shortly after the influenza epidemic, Colonel Robert Tate, the recently appointed New Zealand administrator, arrived to find the Samoans in a state of discontent. He was immediately faced with a petition from Samoan chiefs asking for American or British rule. The petition was ignored and Samoa was accepted by the League of Nations as a New Zealand Mandate territory in 1920. According to historians Peter Hempenstall and Noel Rutherford, "the air of antagonism between New Zealanders and the population of Samoa steadily worsened from that point" (Hempenstall and Rutherford 1984, 33).

Tate's successor was New Zealand's General George Spafford Richardson who arrived in 1923. Richardson was a man with no patience, sympathy, or time for the

Samoaan way of life. His agenda included material reforms, installing a new land tenure system, revoking chiefly *matai* titles, banishing persons without trial, and establishing a government monopoly in the copra industry. He also retained the *Fono O Faipule*, a group of Samoan chiefs appointed by the German administration. Richardson falsely assumed that the chiefs were representative of the entire Samoan population. Instead they represented the *Malo*, a pro-administration group.

An informal opposition group greatly desired self-government and were determined at least to get more representation in the New Zealand Mandate government. The administration repeatedly denied requests to meet with the disgruntled citizens. If they desired to be heard they were advised to express their views through the *Fono O Faipule*. This was an unacceptable request as the *Fono O Faipule* were representatives of the New Zealand administration and unsympathetic to their cause.

### Origins of the *Mau*

In October and November of 1926, meetings were held at the Apia marketplace where Samoans, Europeans, and persons of mixed blood aired their discontent and prepared letters to the Government of New Zealand. The "General Conference of Western Samoa" as the minutes read was "The first conference since the beginning of the world that the whites and the Samoans meeting together." The resolutions of the first meeting include,

1. *Prepare letters of the various things that all of the people of Samoa are not satisfied with and send them to the Government of New Zealand.*
2. *Appoint a committee of six Samoans, six whites, and the three members of the Legislative Body.*
3. *Send a telegram to New Zealand and ask to kindly have the Minister sent to Samoa in November.*
4. *Subjects of letters to be prepared:*
  - I. *That some of the members of the Samoan Faipule should be included in the Legislative Body.*
  - II. (a) *That the various revenues of the Government of Samoa should be investigated and the number and salaries of the white Government employees be reduced.*
  - II. (b) *To investigate the debt of the Government of Samoa to the Government of New Zealand, and what becomes of the money.*
  - III. *The white people request the restoration of their customs and habits concerning liquor.*

- IV. (a) *The complaint of the Samoans regarding the oppressive authority of the Government by taking away Suafa and Matai names from holders, and the deportation of Chiefs and Matais from their own villages to other villages.*
- (b) *The discontentment of the Samoan people regarding the hospital Tax.*
- (c) *The suffering of the Samoan people caused by the numerous different laws with which the people are oppressed by being prohibited from continuing other important Samoan customs.*
- (d) *The prohibiting by force of certain customs which are used to show the dignity of Chief and Faipules of Samoa, such as Fine Mats.*
- (e) *Forbid the Samoan people from leaving their home village to establish a residence in Apia even though marriage or work would lead to the necessity of so doing. (Translation The General Meeting of Western Samoa, October 15, 1926)*

Olaf Fredrick Nelson, a well-respected part-European businessman was the chairperson of this meeting and was subsequently voted into one of the Legislative Council positions. In addition to thanking the voters, Olaf Nelson provided an election platform if he were to be nominated for a second term. The platform which appeared in the *Samoa Times* read,

1. *The reform of the Legislative Council so as to give the people's representatives a more equitable voice in the formation of Government policy.*
2. *The inclusion of Native Members in the Legislative people of the territory.*
3. *The repeal of export duty on cocoa until that industry is more remunerative and such other assistance and encouragement as are necessary to enable bona fide planters to produce a fair return for their labor and capital.*
4. *The promotion of work for local tradesmen.*
5. *The removal of anomalies in respect to the conditions of trades in regard to native debts and control of copra.*
6. *The institution of a more active public works policy in the respect to the necessary roads, bridges, water-supplies, etc., and the bringing about of retrenchments in all other Government expenditure.*
7. *The founding of a civil service for Samoa by the appointment of a larger percentage of local people in Government positions.*

8. *The reform of the Government's Native policy by putting a stop to tyrannical acts such as banishment's, removal of hereditary names, Medical Tax, abolition of native customs, etc., etc.*
9. *Repeal of all arbitrary and drastic regulations such as prohibition, permits to Savaii, etc., etc.*  
(*Samoa Times* November 26, 1926).

The lengthy repetition of Mr. Nelson's speech during the second conference of Western Samoa is critical to the key elements of the beginning of protest. This meeting, held in the market on November 12, 1926, brought together 663 people. It gained the attention of the Governor who sent a personal messenger to present his objection. The objection was heard in the English and Samoan languages. With a nearly unanimous decision, only six opposing, the crowd decided to continue with the meeting. They discussed among other issues the reply to their request to meet with the Prime Minister of New Zealand. As he was not able to travel to Samoa until May they would attempt to organize a committee to bring the issues to him (The Second Conference of Western Samoa, Minutes, November 12, 1926). The Prime Minister never did fulfill his promise to visit Samoa.

Because the administration refused to hear from disgruntled individuals, Europeans and Samoans formed a Citizen's Committee in order to organize a protest. Administrator Richardson quickly declared the Citizen's Committee a seditious organization and ordered Europeans and Part-Europeans not to be involved indirectly or directly with the association. Although the Committee leaders pled their innocence to the administration, the authorities threatened that they would be deported without trial with the approval of the Prime Minister (Nelson 1928, 18).

According to Olaf Frederick Nelson, the disbanded Samoans were provoked by this situation into forming their own anti-government organization. The *Mau* Movement emerged and would gain support from over ninety percent of the population over the next ten years (Nelson 1928, 18).

Protesters against the New Zealand administration in Western Samoa organized in 1926 as the *Mau* Movement. Though the goals of this movement were similar to the movement organized by Lauaki during the era of the German administration the *Mau* was the most successful and unique movement in Samoa's history. Two traditionally opposing *tulafale* bloodlines of Tumua and Pule were forced to unite and fight together for Samoan nationalism. The *Mau* was a peaceful opposition of Samoan people against foreign

Mr. Slipper, barrister and solicitor of the *Mau*, represented the women concerning the administrator's personal failure to satisfy the concerns of the women. In a 1930 letter addressing Blake and Allen he said,

*These leading ladies departed from your presence with the full conviction that no protection against terrorization of women and children could be granted by Your Excellency, and that Your Excellency's attitude was such that terrorization must be expected to be continued until the women of Samoa can persuade their hunted and hounded men to surrender themselves to an unknown fate...The women of Samoa feel that it would be futile and stultifying to themselves to ask Your Excellency for protection against the ravages of uniformed persons. The ladies of Samoa feel that if the terrorization of the women and children is ordained under Your Excellency's authority to continue, then it must continue...The plea of the ladies to the Commodore was made in desperation. To these ladies the matter of life and death is more than a matter of obedience to laws that never have been promulgated either by the Electors of New Zealand or the people of Samoa. They can but die. It is regrettable that death and bloodshed appear to be of small consequence to Your Excellency as compared with the desire, evident and expressed, of absolutism. (Field 1991, 178 from Blake, Police v Slipper 26/2/30 IT 6/56/5)*

Slipper was found guilty of seditious libel for presenting this letter and was sentenced to two terms of three months in jail. He was later released by appeal, but when he appeared in the courtroom several days later to represent surrendered *Mau* men, Allen revoked his license to practice law in Samoa (Parr 1979, 37, Samoa Petition 1931, 105).

In addition to requesting a promise of safety for the women and their children, the women raised questions about the morality surrounding the death of those killed on "Black Saturday." The Women's *Mau* emerged days after the men retreated into the hills to avoid prosecution, enabling open political *Mau* activities to be continued at the dismay of Colonel Allen's administration (Field 1991, 177, Hempenstall and Rutherford 1984, 41, Meleisea 1987, 138, Parr 1979, 36). They held meetings in Vaimoso and Lepea villages, marched in processions, drafted numerous anti-government petitions, raised funds necessary to support the *Mau* newspaper in New Zealand, and wore the *Mau* uniform (Hempenstall and Rutherford 1984, 41). Led by Ala Tamasese (widow of High Chief Tamasese Lealofi III), Rosabel Nelson (wife of O.F. Nelson and daughter of H.J. Moors a prominent European businessman), Paisami Tuimalealiifano (wife of Chief Tuimalealiifano), and

Faamusami Faumuina (wife of High Chief Faumuina Fiaame and daughter of the late King Malietoa Laupepa), four leading ladies of Samoa, the Women's *Mau* was a movement of tremendous traditional power that has been greatly underestimated by historians and by the New Zealand administration (Field, 1991, 177, O.F. Nelson correspondence to H.E. Holland 08/13/1930, Samoan Petition 1931, 105).

Olaf Frederick Nelson sent this New Zealand Post Office Telegraph on January 8, 1930 to H.E. Holland, leader of the New Zealand Labor Party and an ally, which read,

RADIO FROM SKELTON JUST RECEIVED STATES STRONG  
EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FORMED INDIGNATION MEETING  
THURSDAY EUROPEANS MARKET HALL STOP GHASTLY  
SHOOTING HAS OPENED WIDE OLD WOUNDS STOP  
COMPLETE UNITY ALL PARTIES **SAMOAN WOMEN**  
**ACTIVE ORGANIZING NEW MOVEMENT**  
**UNPARALLELED IN SAMOAN HISTORY STOP**  
TUIMALEALIIFANO RECOVERING FAUMUINA GRAZED BY  
BULLET ACROSS SMALL OF BACK STOP TWO OF MY  
WITNESSES HERALD CASE KILLED

(Nelson Correspondence, 1930)

This telegram, sent less than ten days after the killing of Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, shows the promptness of the development of the Women's *Mau*, the recognition by Mr. Nelson that such a movement was unparalleled in Samoa's history, and suggests the determination of the women to continue to unite the people of Samoa, even after a deadly shooting spree.

In a letter to Olaf Nelson, Westbrook described the service dedicated to the memory of their slain leader who was killed the previous year,

*Yesterday...I witnessed a wonderful sight. It was a long procession of probably nearly 1500 women, all dressed in mourning, and carrying wreaths of flowers and floral offerings, for the purpose of holding a ceremonial service at the tomb of the deceased High Chief, decorating his grave and the graves of the other Samoans who were slain on 28 December twelve months ago (Gifford 1964, 79)*

This procession and memorial service remained peaceful despite the rumored threats of the service being turned into a "slaughter greater than that of 1929" (Field 1991, p. 198 from Hall Skelton to Stilworthy 27/12/30 Westbrook MS Folder 13). The Women's *Mau* honored

domination, and dissatisfaction with the administration, the policies, and the lack of representation that had not changed. The people of Samoa clearly would not continue to live as prisoners in their own country. They were even subject to censorship of all reasons of travel and often were refused the issuance of passports.

As mentioned earlier, the administration forbade the Samoans to participate in many cultural activities. One of the activities that is central to Samoan traditions is the event called a *malaga*, or literally "journey." Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea writes,

*This was the fairly constant round of visiting parties which moved in and out of Samoan villages referred to in Samoan as Malaga. These visits were embarked on for various reasons, a marriage feast in another district, a fale tautu or aumoega (courting party) sent to seek a chief's daughter as a wife for another chief, to return an earlier visit from the aualuma or aumaga of another village, to seek political support for a cause, or simply because the village had a shortage of food, possible incurred through the reception of too many outside malaga (Schoeffel Meleisea, Penelope 1979, 451)*

Similar to the control appropriated to them with regard to the distributions of titles, the administration adopted the *malaga* to benefit their own political and social agendas. In fact, administrator Richardson disembarked yearly on an "official" *malaga*. We will see later that his intentions were purely selfish and he did not intend to meet with the villagers about their concerns.

Unlike the groups of "disgruntled natives" before them, the *Mau* developed into an extremely well organized group with most of the population's support, official uniforms, and legal representation. The resistance movement was well represented on Upolu and Savaii. People traveled long distances to attend meetings and to participate in peace marches in the villages of Vaimoso and Lepea on Upolu island. Passive resistance to the colonial government was the vehicle used to reach the organizations' goals. As Michael Field said, "Authority was ignored and neither the poll nor medical taxes were paid. Children were kept away from government schools and births and deaths were not registered" (Field 1991,98). It was clear that the motive of the Samoans was to regain the political and social control of their country. Malama Meleisea writes,



*It is in this respect that the Mau was different from other anti-colonial movements because it asserted the superiority of the Samoan system of government: it was simply a preference for one system against the other.....The Mau was a rejection of external control and systematic change. It reasserted the Samoan capacity for autonomy within the sphere of traditional authority and the expression of a belief that system was capable of accommodating any changes desired by the Samoans (Meleisea 1992,46)*

It did not take long before the administration saw a confrontation lying ahead of them. The New Zealand officials did everything within their power to stop the *Mau* from demonstrating. In the beginning they harassed the few Part-European and European supporters as they believed the "underlying cause of the movement was the exploitative economic ambitions of local Europeans" (Meleisea 1992,45).

Olaf Frederick Nelson, though a very influential figure, was not solely responsible for the existence of the *Mau*. Samoan high chiefs Tamasese, Faumuina, Tuimalealiifono, and other Part-European and sympathetic Europeans were instrumental in organizing the *Mau*. Nelson's role was great in that he provided financial support. He was generous with his business fortune, hosting meetings and providing uniforms to fellow supporters. He co-sponsored the funding necessary to start a private newspaper, *The Samoa Guardian* (later *The New Zealand Samoa Guardian*), where the *Mau* grievances could be published. The newspaper is a fine example of the level of organization and skill exhibited by the supporters of the movement.

O.F. Nelson became a threat to the European community because of his anti-government involvement. He was targeted for arrest several times by the administration in attempts to dissolve the *Mau*. Because of allegations of assisting the *Mau*, Nelson and other European supporters were banished to New Zealand.

However, the *Mau* continued to gain support among both chiefly and untitled men. Nelson's absence provided the opportunity for others, such as high chief Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III to be instrumental in the making of *Mau* history. Tamasese was no stranger to the Administration's police force. In March 1924, Tamasese was banished from his home island and his title was removed after failing to comply with orders to trim his hibiscus hedges in accordance with Richardson's beautification scheme for the villages (Field 1991, 64).

Richardson was replaced during the height of agitation on May 5, 1928. New Zealand's Colonel Stephen Shepherd Allen arrived as the new administrator. He arrived with the newly formed Samoa Military Police from New Zealand who were to destroy the *Mau*. Many Samoans, including Tamasese after his return from exile, were targeted for arrest by the Military Police. Most of the attempts failed due to the strong opposition from the masses. Tamasese was able to remain a tenacious leader for the *Mau* in Samoa.

At the same time, Nelson had traveled to Geneva to petition the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations on behalf of the *Mau*. He was unsuccessful in persuading them to turn the mandate over to Great Britain or grant self-government. According to Michael Field, "At the end of October 1928, in the wake of the Mandate's refusal to accept the *Mau* petitions and a favorable report on the administration, Allen decided that the psychological moment has now arrived for breaking up the *Mau*" (Field 1991,128). This key statement reveals that the administration had support from the New Zealand government to continue to oppose the *Mau's* existence.

### **Women Protest Publicly**

The next fourteen months were spent in attempts to break up the *Mau*. Tupua Tamasese was arrested and sent to New Zealand for evading arrest after failing to pay taxes since 1927. He was followed by his wife Ala Tamasese who spoke publicly against the treatment of her husband by the New Zealand administration. The first meeting of the New Zealand Samoa Defense League was held in the Auckland Town Hall on February 27, 1929. A successful turn-out of fellow protesters, Samoan residents in New Zealand, and some New Zealand sympathizers of the cause were:

*addressed by Masiofo Ala Tamasese pleading with the women of New Zealand to intercede for the people of Samoa. Other grievances are;*

- 1. liquor smuggling,*
- 2. opium smuggling, (suspicious of official involvement with smuggling.)*
- 3. public money stolen by officials no one charged,*
- 4. rape of a married women by Government official who escaped charges,*
- 5. pervert on Savaii (resident commissioner) allowed to retain post long after rumors of crime. He committed suicide during investigation,*

6. *school teacher pedifile in Vaipouli and Apia, then South Island where he murdered his wife and committed suicide,*
7. *gambling at High Official's home, while other homes are raided for small stakes gambling. (Samoa Petition 1931,97)*

This is the earliest report found of women representing themselves on behalf of Samoa and the people of Samoa.

Ala Tamasese related some of the morally offensive behavior of the New Zealand administration in Samoa. Inside the Auckland Town Hall, filled with over a thousand people she said, "The women of Samoa had witnessed unwarranted insults and degradation imposed on the men of Samoa" (Field 1991, 133). According to the list of grievances, the women had also witnessed a series of moral debaucheries committed against them. George Westbrook, long time resident of Samoa, trader, and writer who had opposed the administration for a long time, said before the same audience,

*Can you, as a servant of Christ, remain silent or inactive while such dreadful charges are make against our fellow citizens in Samoa. Can you be deaf to the cry of outraged women and of children despoiled of their natural heritage brought unwanted into life to satisfy bestial lust (Samoa Petition 1931, 97)*

Tupua Tamasese was returned to Samoa in June that same year where he sanctimoniously led the *Mau* with his vow of peace until the fateful day that he was gunned down by the police. December 28, 1929, has ever since been remembered as "Black Saturday." The day began with a procession of around 300 *Mau* persons welcoming returning *Mau* men who had been banished from Samoa for their activities. Tupua Tamasese, who was leading the procession, lifted his hands into the air and called for peace when the crowd became chaotic. The first in a series of shots hit Tamasese and then machine guns were fired into the crowd by the police. A copy of a clipping from *The Samoa Guardian* January 4, 1930 reads,

*Proceeding in orderly fashion along the Parade early on Saturday morning last the ranks of a procession of the Mau were rudely broken by a detachment of police who attempted to arrest two men who were in the procession. Trouble ensued, resulting in the shooting of High Chiefs Tamasese*

*and Tuimalealiifano and many others. The chiefs were removed to the hospital for treatment. Tuimalealiifano was out of the hospital the same day, but the following morning Tamasese died from his wounds. He was buried at Lepea on Monday morning. High Chief Tuimalealiifano is a man of over 80 years of age. There were seven other deaths and so far as is known there are 19 men wounded, some of them seriously.*

The administration professed to have warned the *Mau* leaders that the 'wanted men', or those who had been sought for evading taxes and such, would be arrested on sight at the procession. They also claim that in their attempts to arrest the 'wanted men', stones were thrown at the New Zealand police and they were attacked. In retaliation they opened fire on the *Mau*. The *Mau* claimed that they were not informed which men were wanted and for what crime. These same men who were sought on December 28, 1929 had been in the marketplace and in other processions during the previous weeks, suggesting other opportunities to make the arrests. Although the administration was never found guilty of unnecessary violence, there are a number of witnesses that testified in court about the readiness and preparedness of the police for the massacre.

In a dying appeal, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III said to the people of Samoa,

*My blood has been spilt for Samoa.  
I am proud to give it.  
Do not dream of avenging it, as it was spilt  
in maintaining peace.  
If I die, peace must be maintained at any price* (Parr 1979,  
37, Field 1991, 157)

The death of the unarmed Samoans and High Chief Tamasese had a serious impact on the Samoan population. The killing of the High Chief, while his hands were high above his head as he called out to keep the peace, was the latest in a long line of heinous crimes committed by foreigners against Samoans.

The police continued to use force against the *Mau* men until they were captured. The police pillaged their homes and villages, driving most of them into hiding in the bush. The women who were left in the villages reported several instances of destruction that occurred during night time raids on their homes and families. In a letter written to Reverend Father John Cullen, fellow Englishman C.W. Owen writes,

*Commodore Blake's illegal action in declaring War on these unarmed and defenseless people has compelled the Samoans to take to the bush, leaving the Women and Children at the mercy of the Naval and Military Forces, who, without regard to the Laws of War, raid dwellings at all hours of the night and early morning, turn Women and Children out of their beds, destroy beyond repair, valuable mats and other property and generally terrorize these people (Parr 1979).*

Tamasese's widow reported an instance in which she awoke to encounter ten men armed with fixed bayonets entering her house. They proceeded to destroy the piles of fine mats stored in the rafters, highly valued in Samoan traditions and painstakingly made by the women, by piercing them with the bayonets. Ala Tamasese said,

*I was really frightened when I saw them (in this position), so I got up, then thought of my husband, because he had been shot down for no reason. I thought they were going to do the same thing to me and my children (Field 1991, 173)*

When asked by the police where the men were during one of these raids, she replied, "My house had only one man, he is now in the grave..." She testified in court that the administrator would by all means rather see women and children dead than allow the violation of his laws. (Field 1991, p.179 from Police v Slipper 26/2/30 IT 6/56/5)

Ala Tamasese was not the only woman to be affected by the lack or absence of a husband. In fact most of the women who were left behind in the villages endured frequent "night visits" and interrogations by the police. Some of the women leaders confronted Colonel Allen, and Commodore Geoffrey Blake of the New Zealand forces who was sent over after the riot, to,

*protest against night terrorism on themselves and others, the New Zealand military Administrator and Naval Commander told the women that the war measures would not stop until the men surrendered themselves, so it was in the women's own interest for them to cause their menfolk to do as required (Field 1991, 105)*

Tamasese on that same day every year after 1930. Olaf Frederick Nelson was at last returned from exile in New Zealand on May 16, 1933. Field writes, "Three *fautasi* were on hand to greet the ship while 2,500 Women's *Mau* members stood along the shore. Men were few in numbers; the police had refused permits for most to leave their villages. When Nelson landed he was conducted by procession to Vaimoso where he laid wreaths on the graves of Tupua Tamasese and the other dead of Black Saturday."

The following article appeared in *Pacific Islands Monthly* magazine on 24 January 1935,

*Samoan Mau Commemorates Tamasese's Death*  
December 28, the fifth anniversary of the death of High Chief Tamasese was commemorated by a large procession of the Samoan Women's Mau, in black dresses with white stripes, the Mau uniform. The procession, preceded by a brass band and wives of the leaders of the Mau movement, Tamsese (Daughter of O.F. Nelson) and Faamuina, marched through the main Beach Road of Apia to Tamasese's grave, upon which a large number of wreaths were laid.

In her gender perceptive work, *Daughters of Sina*, Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea reports this of the Women's *Mau*,

*The Women's Mau had been active from the beginning and its major role had been that of fundraising. In all those villages which there was strong support for the Mau (about 90%) the tamaitai and the faletua and tausi led the women of the community in raising funds for the Mau. The women, like the men, wore Mau uniform (a purple lava lava and white top), held meetings, played cricket and were active in all aspects of the movement except protest demonstrations. But when the leading men were driven from the villages the women conducted the meetings, held cricket matches and went on protest marches as all of these activities were banned for the males (Schoeffel Meleisea 1979, 451)*

This passage suggests that women played an essential role in the raising of community funds for the Men's *Mau* and assumed the prominent role of *Mau* protesters in their absence.

The level of determination of the women's *Mau* can be measured in many ways such as by defiance, taking risks, making great sacrifices, and exhibiting skills of

organization and fundraising. The following pages show that the women were indeed highly determined and commanded authority.

Perhaps their greatest show of determination was in the defiance of administrative laws. The administration maintained that while under the United Nations Mandate that was supporting the New Zealand colonial administration of Western Samoa, the *Mau* were acting unlawfully when petitioning to persons and governments outside of the colonial territory of Samoa. This was unfounded according to Olaf Nelson in his report, 'The Truth About Samoa' (Nelson 1928, 8). Many of the women's petitions reached the Prime Minister of New Zealand by way of a European messenger or representative. The petitions began with the unanswered questions surrounding the night time terrorization that had gone unanswered. In a fashion similar to the earlier noted letters, the women publicly question the administration's unjust actions.

Michael Field, author of *Mau: Samoa's Struggle for Freedom* writes this about the Women's *Mau* and their petition of the Administration's actions on Black Saturday, "The Women's *Mau* disputed the police claim that the police station had been under attack, pointing out that Tupua Tamasese was the closest person to the station killed or wounded. The petition said that it was impossible to believe that Samoans attacking twenty-three armed policemen should escape casualties closer than that point." In the Petition dated July 1930, the women wrote, "Our Prince was killed whilst in the act of holding up his arms and exhorting people to remain peaceful and exhorting the Police to cease fire. He was, in our view, shamefully killed, as were his succourers, and though we may, in time, forgive, we can never forget" (Field 1991, p.194 from IT 1/23/8). This petition was unsuccessful in convincing the administration of its wrongdoing.

The *Mau* women communicated with other men such as Mr. Fitzherbert, a European businessman, to conduct interviews and take their complaints to the Prime Minister of New Zealand. In an undated letter, "The Women of Samoa" tell the Prime Minister that Mr. P.B. Fitzherbert is a good man and has been chosen by them to speak of the troubles in Samoa on their behalf. The letter reads,

*Sir,  
We the undersigned authorities of the Women of Samoa who  
interviewed Colonel Allen and Commodore Blake send  
greetings.*

*This letter is to tell you of our great admiration for Mr. P.B. Fitzherbert who we believe is a just and good man. Mr. P.B. Fitzherbert will give you facts of some of the unjust things that happened here during his stay in Samoa. We feel that New Zealand is not against us but will in time hear the plea of the unfortunate Women of Samoa. We have the honour to be  
Sir,  
Your loyal and obedient servants.*

A second draft of this letter read,

*This is a letter of Power given by us to your attention so you may know of our grief and troubles. We have the power and authority of nearly the whole of the Women of Samoa and make Mr. P. B. Fitzherbert our agent...He has our authority to present our case and arrange with you for a Commission to inquire into these matters...We address you in this matter as owing to the tragedy of the 28th December last when our Prince Tamasese and many others were killed we cannot ever address Colonel Allen... (Women's Mau to New Zealand P.M., Nelson Correspondence undated)*

The women not only sent official documents to express their dissatisfaction with the colonial administration, but on the day of administrator Colonel Stephen Shepard Allen's departure from his post in Western Samoa in April of 1931, the Women's *Mau* sent him the following personal message,

*You depart from our country, leaving us with sorrowful hearts on the one hand and rejoicing on the other. We grieve because it is not possible to erase from our minds, even unto our children, the many tragedies which have occurred in Samoa during your term of office. We rejoice because you are leaving our country. We shall remember your name when we think of our sufferings by day and night during the last two years (Field 1991, 200 from Women's Mau to Allen 3/4//31 IT 1/23/8)*

The *Mau* movement was still considered a seditious organization by the administration. Any involvement of European or Part European residents could have resulted in arrest under the Samoa Seditious Act, 1930 which said,



*3(4) No person shall participate in activities or aid abet or encourage in any way whatsoever the continuance of activities or objects of any seditious organization or by any badge, symbol, uniform, flag, banner, or any other means whatsoever identify himself with or express his approval of any seditious organization.*

*4 Penalties. Every person who commits an offense against Regulation 3 hereof shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months or to a fine not exceeding two hundred pounds (Samoa Times January 17, 1930)*

Facing daily harassment from the New Zealand administration, Mrs. Rosabel Nelson and her sister Mrs. Priscilla Muench, Part European members of the Women's *Mau* were indicted for "participating in a native demonstration," and were soon released for good behavior (Samoa Petition 1931, 105).

### **Defiance and Determination**

Another risk taken by members of the Women's *Mau* was their rebellion against imposed curfews. The administration's regulations required that persons not leave their houses at night and temporarily required Samoans to obtain police permission to leave their resident villages during all hours (Samoa Petition 1931, 105).

Despite the imposed regulations, Samoan women left their villages and sometimes disguised the vehicles they traveled in. Rosabel Nelson writes to Olaf Nelson, "After this I went across to Safata on horseback and stopped at most every village, you may be sure I was kept busy with the men and the women." She continues in the same letter to say, "The Men and the Women are all strong and I will go to Aana and Atua after the *Tofua* to cheer them up" (Nelson, R. to Nelson O. 8/23/30). As the second shareholder of her husband's company Mrs. Nelson attempted to use company vehicles to disguise her travels. On one occasion she explained the events to her husband. She reported, "Another time I asked Schafhausen for (#)100 car one night to take Faumuina and myself to Falefa and he sent it and on its way Harry meets it and sent it back. I then had to take my big car which is so well known in the rain and darkness and in fear of being caught and on the most dangerous road in Samoa" (Nelson, R. to Nelson, O. 6/25/30).

Rosabel makes an interesting reference to a possible journey to American Samoa. She writes, "I may go to Pago Pago so as to hear how our people are going to fare when

Americans arrive. Have not seen our *Mau* if any will go along and am not sure if the American Government will allow me to land as I am rather a dangerous person to have. I believe that both the *Mau* Men and *Mau* Women have placed their full confidence in me at all times" (Nelson, R. to Nelson, O. 8/23/30). Declaring herself a "dangerous person to have" Rosabel Nelson suggests that she knew her actions to be seditious.

Olaf Nelson, concerned with this recent letter, replied, "I note the good work you are doing in traveling to the outside districts but I think it were better that you are careful so that the government do not interfere and then the Women's *Mau* will lose your help and guidance. They can do things in Samoa which will not be tolerated in any other part of the world" (Nelson, O. to Nelson, R. 9/5/30). Nelson showed apprehension of his wife's activities because he was familiar with the administration's attitude towards women and mixed races and the possibility of encountering a dangerous situation.

Another example of the women's great determination for "*Samoa mo Samoa*" is the dedication that it took for them to disregard the words of the church leaders who pled with them to stop the *Mau*. Resident ministers, missionaries and their wives, who were very influential in the lives of Samoan women, were unable to convince them to repudiate the *Mau*. The Christian faith had been introduced to Samoa one hundred years earlier, in 1830, and adopted by nearly all Samoans. This resulted in many changes to the social and political structure of Samoa, as it adapted to include Christianity. The daily life of women changed dramatically as they were expected to assume roles as deferential Christian wives and mothers. The reverends and ministers undermined traditional *matai* authority. When the women called upon their traditional roles and traditional political system to protest against the administration, they rejected the authority of reverends and ministers.

The Reverend called Bati was compelled to write letters to the *Mau* that were intended to stir up feelings of guilt. In the biography of Reverend Bati, T. Reid writes, "But his big problem was the *Mau*. So long as they resisted the government, unrest and disorder would prevail in the island and the church would suffer" (Reid 1960, 106). The women were undoubtedly subjected to an even greater amount of pressure from the church and its leaders.

At great risk, due to the possible consequences for the family members, the women also chose to give up European imported goods, refused to pay taxes, withdrew their children from government schools, and refused western medical treatments. European

goods available for purchase at the time included canned goods, shoes, and washing powders. These and other imported items were a luxury, they increased work productivity, and are associated with high social status. The boycott of such goods began during the German administration to protest against higher prices for Samoan consumers.

*Mau* supporters stopped paying taxes to the administration because they were being unfairly taxed without representation. Failing to pay taxes resulted in several *Mau* members having to serve time in exile, including Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, the slain *Mau* leader. The women continued this form of protest despite the possible consequences.

Formal education had been in existence in Samoa since the establishment of missions early in the nineteenth century. The opportunities for the children of the *Mau* members to obtain the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in capitalist Samoa through formal education were forsaken as a stand against the government. The women, some of who were highly educated themselves overseas and knew the importance of formal education, chose to relinquish this privilege for their children on behalf of the movement.

Health care provided by the government not only employed many women, but had become a backup to traditional medicines following the influenza epidemic in 1918. Traditional healing in Samoa is usually the practice of females, therefore boycotting the hospitals brought additional pressure onto themselves.

The above examples were extremely difficult decisions and sacrifices for a wife and mother to make for her family. These choices are examples of the women's strong show of determination for the *Mau* movement and a show of unified solidarity.

One women's individual determination was reflected in the correspondence between Rosabel Nelson and her estranged husband Olaf Nelson. They endured marital problems that caused them to separate. The custody of their three daughters was granted to O.F. Nelson. Despite these family problems, the two were devoted to the cause of Samoa. They frequently corresponded while he was exiled in New Zealand about the activities of the Women's *Mau*. Her letters to her husband were very encouraging for the Women's *Mau*. Rosabel wrote to Olaf Nelson on August 23, 1930,

*The Mau Women of Samoa is over 8000. Savaii is as strong as Apia and do everything we do. We have a letter from the*

*Women's International League For Peace and Freedom  
which I will copy out for you (Nelson Correspondence  
08/23/30)*

In a letter written to his wife, Olaf F. Nelson wrote from New Zealand, "I am quite proud of the part you have played in the formation of the Women's *Mau* and I agree with you that the Men's *Mau* might have greatly weakened if not given in altogether but for the part played by the women under your guidance and leadership"(Nelson Correspondence 05/27/30). In a second letter he complimented the Women's *Mau* for their ability to get international attention and support for the cause of Samoa,

*The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom  
(New Zealand Branch) is keeping in touch with me and so is  
their headquarters in Geneva. I am pleased that you received  
a letter from this League. Things are moving for the Mau all  
over the world now and we have only to keep the peace and  
keep the activities up for a great change to come about in the  
near future (Nelson Correspondence 09/05/30)*

The couple even developed a code system to insure the security of their confidential messages to one another when communicating through telegraph. Though the date of transmission if not clear, a copy of an original New Zealand Post Office Telegraphs document to O.F. Nelson reads,

JEHPO JULUK UMPET UNE ODVADUHHYM KOLYUIJNA + ROSABEL

A handwritten translation of the telegraph, assumed to be written by Mr. Nelson himself reads, "Referring to your letter of by last mail to Une please telegraph immediately name of informant. Rosabel." Mr. Nelson's hand written reply to her telegraph is scratched on a blank piece of paper as follows, "Replying to your telegram just received I am writing fully by mail leaving tomorrow Taisi." He then codified this message to read,

UGDUL HUNAM WREB JULLY JAKAJ UNBNO TAISI<sup>5</sup>  
(Nelson Correspondence)

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<sup>5</sup>Taisi - the Samoan Title held by Olaf F. Nelson.

These coded messages were critical to continue their correspondence as letters from Olaf Nelson regarding the *Mau* situation had been confiscated from Rosabel's house. She was instructed by Olaf Nelson to destroy all letters received from him to ensure the safety of everyone involved. She failed to do so, hiding them inside a coffee tin where they would be discovered during an evening raid. This secret code enabled the couple to pass along critical information quickly and without the interference of the administration.

A final example of determination displayed by the Women's *Mau* was the vital emphasis they gave to fundraising. Several references to the collection and donations of funds by the Women's *Mau* suggest that these women were successfully skilled in the arts of fundraising and budgeting. In addition to paying for the services of Mr. Thomas Slipper and Mr. P.B. Fitzherbert, the women mailed substantial donations to Olaf Nelson in New Zealand as financial support for his expenses and the expenses of the *Mau* newspaper, *The New Zealand Samoa Guardian*. Rosabel wrote to her estranged husband,

*The Women started the Mau right away in fact they sent over 2.10/- for their tafona. Since I returned the Mau Ladies arrived here to stay they wish to send you our tafona to help. I wrote the Samoan letter which you will receive this time with our present towards expenses. It is our hope to do all we can and send something every mail (Nelson, R. to Nelson, O. 8/23/30)*

On September 5, 1930, Olaf F. Nelson wrote, "The donation from the Women's *Mau* which came to hand by this *Tofua* of £111 is very welcome indeed...I had some money left from the fund which together with these contributions enables me to transfer £500 to the *Guardian* account which stood at £1712.8.2 but is now reduced to 1212.8.2." He reminds his wife of the great importance of the women's donations for the survival of the *Mau* in saying, "The *Guardian* is the best weapon we have now to offset their lying propaganda and that is the reason why the government here is trying to suppress it but we shall continue to issue it until they actually stop us...It is therefore necessary for the *Mau* (Men's and Women's) to help along with contributions wherever possible" (Nelson, O. to Nelson, R. 9/5/30). A documented donation shows £38 sent to Mr. O.F. Nelson August 18, 1932, £30 coming from the Women's *Mau* (Nelson Correspondence, 1928-1933).

The women also paid Mr. Slipper's fines to the court of New Zealand, a total of £122.16.0, and then received a charge for an additional £65. According to Rosabel

Nelson, Mr. Slipper's appeal to New Zealand was delivered without the consent of the Women's *Mau*, and they were therefore not obligated to pay his fines much less his fee. She wrote in a letter to Olaf Nelson, "I just wonder who is suffering the most Slipper or the Women of Samoa whose husbands are in jail and those who are out are being hunted like wild animals in the villages" and "What are the lawyers in New Zealand doing must they call on the unfortunate Women of Samoa to pay" (Nelson, R. to Nelson, O. 6/25/30).

In spite of the obvious popularity and influence of the movement, the New Zealand administration repeatedly assured the international press that the *Mau* had ceased to exist shortly after the men had taken to the bush. The *Fiji Times and Herald*, a widely distributed and respected newspaper in the South Pacific read,

*There may be occasional secret meetings of leaders, but whatever life remains in the movement is derived from the inspiration of the propaganda from New Zealand that arrives every mail...The women's Mau is dying. On steamer days some of its members parade through Apia, but usually they are simply on their way to attend a fia fia or cricket match. The women's Mau is generally ignored, and is suffering the fate that usually follows that attitude by the public. A sign of its decay is that the Mau lava lava, formerly reserved for ceremonial occasions, is now often seen on women during their fishing or plantation work (Fiji Times and Herald 12/5/30)*

This pro-administration article appeared in the *Pacific Islands Monthly Magazine*, then published in Australia on October 19, 1932,

*Reports which continue to reach us from Western Samoa are conflicting and confusing. On the other hand, we are assured by the New Zealand authorities, in personal as well as official correspondence, that the Mau movement in Western Samoa is dying out, insofar as active hostility to the present Administration is concerned, and that if Western Samoa is only left alone it will presently settle down to peace and tranquillity (Pacific Islands Monthly October 19, 1932)*

Six months before that article appeared, an Apia correspondent contributed this article to the same magazine, titled "*Mau Women Hold Monster Meeting*" it read,

*To prove to the world and to the Administration that the Mau is not dead and still "going strong", women partisans of the*

*Mau movement have just held a monster meeting at Leulumoega <sup>6</sup>, on the west coast of Upolu. It is estimated that at least 2000 women in their blue "uniforms" participated in this review of Mau adherents. They were conveyed to and from the meeting place by numerous motor buses (Pacific Islands Monthly April 23, 1932).*

The conflicting reports were probably confusing to the readers who were following the situation in Apia.

### **A New Identity**

The administration ultimately acknowledged the presence of the Women's *Mau* movement in the media. They suggested that the women were only seeking the attention of tourists and were acting merely in imitation of the men. In the Annual Report by the administrator for the New Zealand Department of External Affairs for the year 1930/31 it said,

*While the Mau has ceased for the time to be of practical importance, it may be expected to revive a little for the benefit of tourists as each dry season recurs, and its complete end may be delayed if the financial returns from visitors are sufficient. The women's Mau deserves a passing notice. Its monthly appearance when the mail-steamer arrived produced a dwindling parade of its members through Apia to the end of 1930. On the 28th December a general muster of all its supporters was ordered, for a march to the tomb of the late Tamasese, to be followed by a religious service; 454 took part in the procession, and 613 of all ages were present at the service. This was its last appearance, but it also may be expected to revive in the dry season, for financial reasons, if tourists are plentiful (New Zealand Department of External Affairs 1928/29-1941/45)*

The administration not only discounted the women's significance in the media, but publicly insulted their moral and social values. Michael Field writes, "An angry Allen tried to discredit the movement by saying it consisted of "many old women and all known prostitutes." (Field 1991,p177)

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<sup>6</sup>Leulumoega is one of the most politically important village in Samoa. It was, according to Kramer, the residence for many female chieftaness'.

In the tenth report of the government of New Zealand on the administration of the Mandated Territory of Western Samoa the Women's *Mau* is described as follows,

*A peculiar development of the dispersal of the Mau has been the commencement of a "Women's Mau", which during March has been holding meetings at Vaimoso and has paraded through Apia in imitation of the former action of the men. This movement has been originated by two half-caste women, who are both actively opposed to the Administration. During the last three years the large number of men collected at the Mau centers has caused much loosening of morals, and has attracted to the villages round Apia many dissolute women, whose occupation has gone with the dispersal of the men. Among these women it has been an easy task to spread the principles of lawlessness, and they now accompany their leaders in processions, assemble at Vaimoso, and annoy the passers-by with impertinent remarks and loose behavior. They are, however bringing the Mau into ridicule and contempt.<sup>7</sup>*

Olaf F. Nelson failed in an attempt to petition that this section of the report be omitted because its contents were misleading and abusive to the womanhood of Samoa, and in fear that it might cause a disturbance in Samoa. Nelson wrote to H.E. Holland, "It seems incredible to me that a man holding a position of authority which requires dignity such as the administrator of Western Samoa, should stoop to such abuse and offensive language as is contained in this Report. It has been universally admitted that the Samoan women are conspicuous for their high morals and chastity amongst the Polynesian races and do not fall short of the best in the world in this regard" (Nelson Correspondence 1930).

One occasion is recorded in which the Samoan women perhaps were not acting dignified was retold to Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea by a daughter of one of the leaders of the Women's *Mau*. This was interpreted by the administration as a lude act done by dissolute women. It seems that while marching in uniform down the main street of Apia, as they usually did, the police aimed fire hoses at them. In retaliation all the women turned away and bared their bottoms to the men. This Samoan interpretation of events is drastically different, and according to Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea,

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<sup>7</sup>Samoan Petition 1931: 117/17.



*This gesture is a particularly female insult and regarded by the Samoans as one which is totally humiliating to the recipient but implies no impropriety to the one who is so provoked as to do it. In Samoan eyes the dignity that is associated with women makes the gesture of particularly gross insult as it is in such sharp contrast with the ideally restrained conduct of women (Meleisea 1979,452)*

Nonetheless, their actions were provoked by the police officers that turned the firehoses on them.

Women's status and dignity, during the New Zealand administration, was often an issue that the Men's *Mau* referred to when expressing their complaints to officials. In fact, resident medical doctor S.M. Lambert wrote,

*Years later after the messy thing had subsided, one of the Mau leaders, Faumuina - since promoted to a good government post - told me that official neglect of women did much toward fermenting the revolt (Lambert 1941, 215)*

This neglect of women by the administration can be exemplified by an incident where a dying Samoan women had been in the process of giving birth for five days, and though the resident doctor was present he was ordered by the Administrator Brigadier Sir George Richardson to ignore cries for help and move on with the official annual *malaga* schedule (Lambert 194, 215). This incident helped ignite the Samoans case against the administration.

Mr. F.D. Baxter and Mr. Thomas B. Slipper, official *Mau* counsel, petitioned to the New Zealand Royal Commission on Western Samoa in 1927 with this quote from Matautia Karauna and Edwin Gurr,

*Starting from ourselves and our wives, even to our children, we all complain together at the weight of the load we have to carry nowadays, brought about by some laws made expressly for the Samoans, oppressing us to the point of slavery, whereas we cannot believe our status (New Zealand Royal Commission on Western Samoa 1927, App 1.6)*

"Women's Places" was the title of a letter written to the editor of the *Samoa Times* (pro-administration newspaper) 11 January 1930 which illustrates the position given to women in society at that time,

*As for those married women who feel that they possess talents that ought to benefit society, let those women work through their husbands. Let them teach and inspire their husbands by their gifts and talents, and then the husbands will pass on the fruits of their wives' wisdom to the larger fields which the men work. Thus the unity and the home, the tight order of society, and humanity's welfare will all be conserved.*

The opinions expressed in the article titled "Women's Places" appears also to be the opinion of many historians who have written about Samoa's political history. If the historian includes women in the history of the *Mau* movement, they have failed to research beyond the records and newspaper quotes of the administration.

Historian M.C. Gifford acknowledges the formation of the women's *Mau*, however he devalues their credibility as having little significance in the territory. He reports this after declaring the *Mau* movement extinguished,

*At the same time, a new phase of the Movement, the Women's Mau emerged. Its leaders were largely European and half-caste women of Apia who tried to carry on where Nelson had left off. One the whole, the Women's Mau remained orderly, and its activities were of only minor significance in the territory. Members were not seen much except on "Tofua Days", when there were some visitors in Apia whom they hoped to impress, and on public holidays or other ceremonial occasions...But apart from their regular monthly processions, the Women's Mau had little influence on the natives or on residents in , or visiting to, the territory...Thus in contrast to the political situation in the three years proceeding "Black Saturday" (28 December 1929), the three years following it were quiet and orderly, with a minimum of agitation and unrest. (Gifford 1964, 79-80 )*

Similarly, Felix Maxwell Keesing, wrote this in *Modern Samoa: Its Government and Changing Life*, suggesting that the Women's *Mau* was insignificant to the overall effectiveness of the movement,

*...a Samoan Women's Mau, the anti-government organization has been driven below the surface...while the Women's Mau conducts meetings, uniformed processions, cricket matches, and other activities made illegal for the men, especially on boat days when there are white visitors in Apia (Keesing 1934,156)*

In addition to such sexist attitudes, the women of Samoa were faced with the New Zealand colonial administrations' legacy of racial inequality. Mary Boyd, in her article "Racial Attitudes of New Zealand Officials in Western Samoa" relates the administration's paternalistic attitude to social Darwinism. According to her, "Scientific racism did not acutely infect New Zealand officials in Samoa until the *Mau* years, 1926-36, when about 90% of the people passively resisted alien rule" (Boyd 1987, 142). The assertiveness of the Samoans and the desire to regain sovereign power of their country, forced deep-lying racism to the surface. Samoan author and Professor Albert Wendt writes in his Masters thesis titled *Guardians and Wards* this about the administration's beliefs:

*There were, so the myth went, ethical and moral deficiencies in the Samoan make-up; the Samoans were deceitful, evasive, dishonest, vain. There were intellectual deficiencies also: the Samoans were stupid, lacking in imagination, infuriating in their child likeness, irrational, and incapable of managing their own affairs. Further proof of their 'inferiority' was their adamant refusal to adopt papalagi<sup>8</sup> forms of social, political and economic organization (Wendt 1965, 59)*

According to Wendt, a myth concerning the *papalagi* emerged during this same period. He writes, "Centuries of isolation had fashioned a deep conservatism within the Samoan people, an arrogant conservatism conducive to an almost fanatical adherence to their customs and traditions, to their socio-political system even when such a system meant civil war and political instability. Such conservatism and pride led inevitably to the view among the Samoans that they were superior to the *papalagi* (Wendt 1965, 60). The term *fia palagi*, meaning "to act as a Caucasian", became a term of derision.

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<sup>8</sup>Caucasian

The myths of racial hierarchy were not the only facet of racism in Western Samoa at the time. Years of interracial relationships between men of European stock resulted in a population of peoples with mixed blood. Derogatory terms such as half-caste and the Samoan translation *afakasi*, were frequently used to identify these persons, suggesting that only half of the individual was deserving of an identity. In 1920 the administration required those persons claiming European status to register (Shankman 1989, 229). The options of identity at the time were Samoan or Part-European. Part-Samoan was not an option. Having to make this distinction for oneself was difficult due to the implications it had on one's life and family. Having a single identity is a foreign concept to Samoans whose identity can vary from situation to situation, according to one's bloodline relations.

Self identity as a Samoan or Part-European in New Zealand Samoa was the determining factor of economic, social, and political status. Paul Shankman writes in 'Race Class and Ethnicity in Western Samoa,' "The chief advantages to such a change were social status and legal and political privilege." For example, a Part-European identity may provide you with more employment opportunities but will usually alienate you from any Samoan land allocated for the "natives". "Not only were there different economic opportunities and different land tenure systems for the different groups," says Shankman, but "there were also different wage scales, different schools, different courts, and different hospital wards assigned on the basis of race" (Shankman 1989, 234). There was often resentment from others, as Wendt explains, "Even the Part-European was viewed as part of the European world, as someone no different from his pure-blooded counterpart, and duly discriminated against" (Wendt 1965, 60).

In addition to the Samoan, Part-European, and European groups, there was also the presence of indentured laborers of mainly Chinese descent, along with Fijian and Solomon Islanders. They too added another dimension to the racial inequalities of New Zealand Samoa. The administration prohibited marriage between Samoan women and resident Chinese laborers. The *Pacific Islands Monthly* magazine published a story that read in part,

*The object of this Ordinance<sup>9</sup> is to replace a former proclamation which prohibited the cohabitation of Samoan women and Chinese coolies. This proclamation had been in*

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<sup>9</sup>The Overseas Labourers' Control Ordinance, 1931.

*existence practically since the military occupation of Samoa by New Zealand in 1914, but had never been enforced by the authorities, with the unfortunate results<sup>10</sup> which were published in this paper (Pacific Islands Monthly February 22, 1932)*

The author shows that women of Part-European and Samoan descent were doubly oppressed by the sexist and the racist attitudes of the New Zealand administration in Western Samoa. The author also demonstrates that the formation and activities of the Women's *Mau* movement continued despite the media cover up and the harsh measures to dismantle it. They made numerous sacrifices for their families, their kinsfolk, and for their traditional, social, economic and political system to continue the movement following the riot known as "Black Saturday". The Women's *Mau* continued their struggles, knowing their fight would end only when the power of the New Zealand administration was dissolved and the *Mau* men returned with dignity. The women did continue their fight until the men returned from the bush and prisons between 1930 and 1936.

## Conclusions

Samoa's *Mau* engaged in its first formal dialogue in June of 1936 with government officials and agreed to compromise a number of their grievances. As quickly as the Women's *Mau* movement developed in 1930 it dissolved in 1936. The women returned to their traditionally powerful and respected roles in the politically decentralized villages. Without the determination of the Women's *Mau* movement it is likely that the *Mau* would have ceased to exist in 1930 as the administration had strategically planned. The compromise between *Mau* and New Zealand officials led mostly to superficial arrangements of power for male *Mau* members, but nevertheless it gave the *Mau* the representation that they fought for at the beginning of their struggle. The compromise also provided the stable political environment that was necessary for achieving its independence in 1962.

It is demonstrated above that the Women's *Mau* was vital to the overall success of the resistance movement and is an excellent example of female assertion of political, social and economic authority in Samoa's history. In addition to the historical significance of the Women's *Mau*, the author has suggested that the women were fulfilling the social covenant

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<sup>10</sup>Children of mixed ancestry.

*feagaiga* when forming their own faction, giving the movement cultural significance as well.

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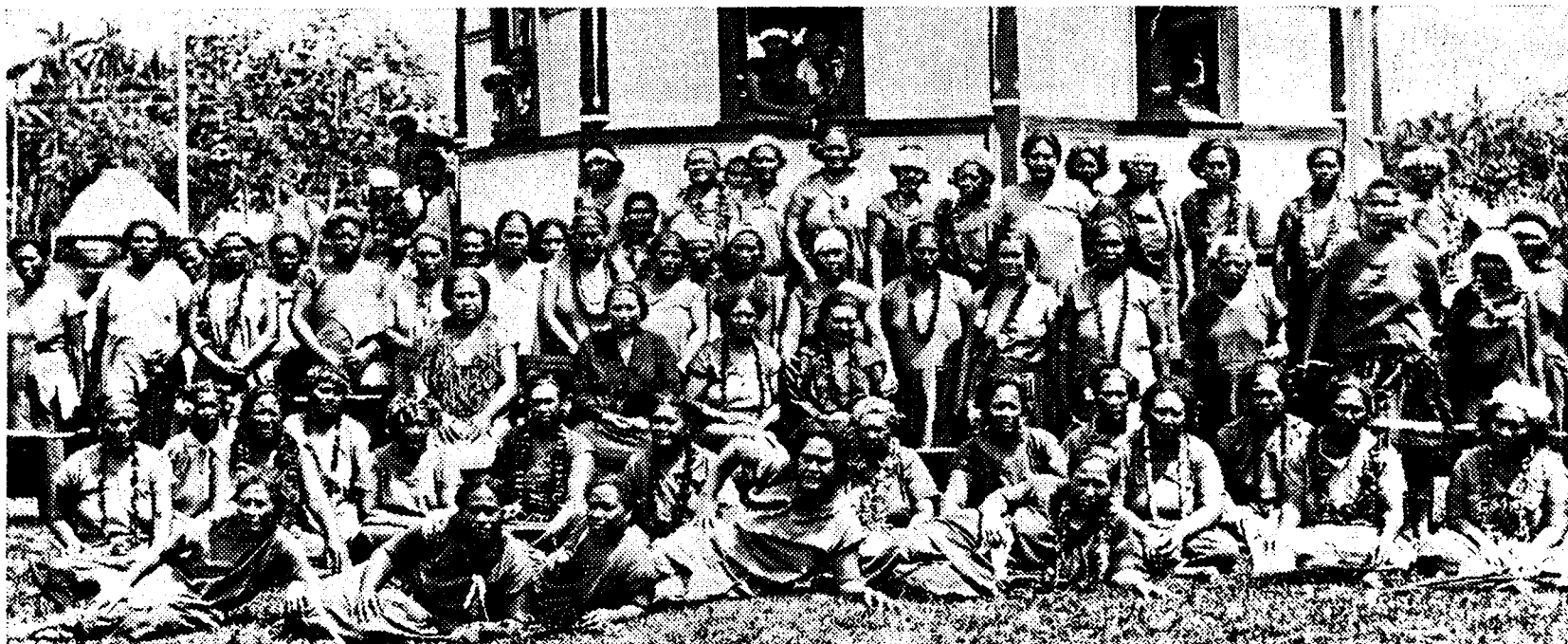
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## SAMOA WOMEN'S MAU IN CONGRESS



Unable to find the Samoan men when they took refuge in the jungle, the New Zealand naval and military forces made war on the Samoan women and children, going fully armed into their homes at night, destroying food and damaging property.

(The four seated in the centre are the wives of High Chiefs Tuimalealiifano, Faumuina, and Taisi, with the widow of High Chief Tamasese—dressed in black.)

## Leaders of the Samoan Women's Mau



The Maisofos Tuimalealiifano, Tamasese, Taisi and Faumuina.

After the war against the Mau in 1930 these leading Samoan ladies (who were educated abroad) led the women of Samoa in demonstrations against the military governor. In his last report to the League of Nations Colonel S. S. Allen referred to the Women's Mau of Samoa as "dissolute women" "whose occupation had gone" when the Samoan men went into the jungle to avoid collision with the N.Z. armed forces. Colonel Allen's wholesale aspersions on the purity of Samoa's womanhood are still keenly resented by the Samoan people.

## The Masiofo (Princess) Tamasese



Educated at Auckland, N.Z., and now head of the Samoan Women's Mau.

## CARTOON



When the Mau was declared "seditious" the Samoan women formed a Women's Mau, which continues to make demonstrations against the administration. This cartoon in the "Auckland Star" depicts the embarrassment of the officials at the women's activities.